

### TENNESSEE HIGHWAY PATROL VEHICLE STOPS DURING 2006: A SUMMARY



Public Chapter 193 of 2005 requested the Comptroller's Office to analyze the THP's traffic stops for one year, to determine whether race and ethnicity appear to play a role in troopers' decisions to stop motorists. During 2006, troopers were required to record information on every vehicle stop, including the race/ethnicity, gender, and age of person stopped; the reason for and result of the stop; whether a search occurred; the type and legal basis of search, and whether contraband was discovered or property seized.

#### OVERALL CONCLUSION:

**Vehicle stops of White, African American, and Other drivers appeared racially proportionate to Tennessee's valid drivers; Hispanic drivers appeared to be overrepresented. Additional analysis of post-stop activities such as search, disposition, and physical evidence seizure showed some variation by race; Hispanic drivers were overrepresented in many post-stop activities.** Stopped drivers include drivers without licenses or certificates and drivers from other states; consequently "valid" drivers is not a perfect benchmark. Vehicle stop data analysis cannot determine whether racial profiling caused law enforcement to make such stops, but can indicate the presence or absence of racial disparity among vehicle stops. Many factors may affect whether a law enforcement officer stops a motorist for a moving or non-moving violation.

#### VEHICLE STOPS CONCLUSIONS:

**Drivers of all races were stopped at similar rates, with the exception of Hispanic drivers.** One of 19 African American and white drivers was stopped, compared to 11 Hispanic drivers.

**Moving violations, such as speeding, were the most commonly identified reason for vehicle stops regardless of race.** African American and Other drivers were stopped for moving violations at slightly higher rates and for non-moving violations at slightly lower rates than Hispanic and white drivers.

#### POST-STOP ACTIVITIES CONCLUSIONS:

**Drivers received citations, the most commonly identified disposition, at similar rates regardless of race.** Ninety percent of stops resulted in a citation.

**Of drivers initially stopped for any violation, Hispanic drivers were arrested at a higher rate than any other racial group.** One of 19 stopped Hispanic drivers was arrested, compared to one of 32 African American drivers and one of 49 white drivers.

**Search rates varied by race.** Hispanic and American Indian drivers were searched at higher rates than other racial groups.

**Rates of physical evidence seized varied by race.** Searched Hispanic drivers had physical evidence seized at a rate of 15% compared to 25% of white drivers and 28% of searched African American drivers.

#### TRAINING CONCLUSION:

**Troopers receive some pre-service and in-service cultural diversity training, but more specific application to vehicle stops may be needed.**

#### RECOMMENDATION:

The Comptroller of the Treasury encourages the Tennessee Highway Patrol to reflect on the stop and post-stop data presented within this report and use it to inform statewide and district-level policies, procedures, and training.